

HE WAS THE FIRST N-W COMMISSIONER

Mr. Geoffrey Drake-Brockman, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Slade Brockman, was a civil engineer. He was president of the Australian Institute of Engineers and was latterly chairman of the Transport Board.

Geoffrey received the MC in the Great War and in the next one was promoted to brigadier at Army HQ in Melbourne, where he was director of works and fortifications.

On his return from the Great War, Geoffrey married 20-year-old Henrietta Jull, daughter of Dr. Roberts and Public Service Commissioner Mr. M. E. Jull — a girl who was later to become an authoress of wide standing. Infected by the literary enthusiasm of his wife, Geoffrey Drake-Brockman has written an autobiography *The Turning Wheel*.

Mr. Drake-Brockman was appointed Commissioner for the North West from 1921 to 1926 when the position was abolished. He was the first to hold the position.

Terms of his appointment were:

The Commissioner of the North-West's province is to watch generally over all Government activities in the North. To act quickly anticipating Ministerial approval even though an expenditure of several hundreds of pounds may be involved when necessary.

To have matters, in connection with all departments, requiring attention in the North-West brought to the notice of the Minister for the North-West so that Departments concerned can take necessary action take a recommendation from the Commissioner of the North-West for their guidance.

To ascertain all reasonable requirements of the North at each centre from personal observation and enquiry, adjust any urgent matters at once and refer other matters with estimates and recommendations for Minister's decision.

To receive requests from road boards and other North-West organisations. Finalise requests as far as possible on the spot and when not possible forward same with recommendation for the Minister's decision.

To collect information

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in connection with northern development proposals, such as irrigation and land settlement schemes etc., so as to be prepared to submit proposals when such may become practical policies. This meant travelling through the country and generally living the life of the country, so as to understand the conditions and particular difficulties surrounding life in the North.

To maintain all existing government public facilities from Shark Bay to Wyndham with the exception of Port Hedland Railway and Wyndham Meatworks. This meant keeping a careful watch over works, including jetties, tramways, water-supplies, stock, bores, building, lights, etc. Deciding what maintenance work is to be carried out determining the order of doing work according to funds available and controlling organisation for carrying out work throughout the country.

The maintenance costs for previous four years (1917 to 1920) had averaged only about £15,000 (\$30,000).

To prepare and carry out a programme of new works averaging about £50,000 (\$100,000) a year.

To prepare schedule and carry out work in the North-West from Commonwealth - State Road Grant funds.

When in 1922 Mr. Drake-Brockman took over the position his territory covered from the 26th latitude to Cape Londonderry and eastwards past the Canning stock route. It was approximately 560,000 square miles in size with a population round about 8,600 whites and some 15,000 natives.

The new North West department also inherited the Native Welfare Department. This he subsequently found was unfortunate as the North disliked and resented government interference in regard to natives.

Control of the public works was next transferred to the Commissioner.

Shortly after appointment he took his wife to the North West and by ship toured the area of duty and met the local residents. They then made their home in Broome, the new headquarters of the North West Department.

Subsequently in company with his wife and the resident engineer he made a tour of the inland and met station people townspeople and local government officers.

Following their inspection with the engineer he set about planning all along the coast. A supervisor and a small team of workmen were appointed at each port. He saw these improvements gradually taking shape.

In 1925 Mr. and Mrs. Drake-Brockman became parents, a daughter Julia being born to them.

When the Labour government came into power in 1925, its policy was to disband the North West Department.

In 1926 this happened much to the disappointment of Nor'Westers who acknowledged the greatly improved conditions since the advent of the Department. All Mr. Drake-Brockman's plans for development and research which he had been preparing as he moved round were shattered.

He then became stationed in Perth attached to the Works Department as engineer for the North West with a resident engineer in Broome a position he held until 1940.

During this time they lived at Cottesloe where a son was born.

Altogether he gave 45 years of service to the Public Works Department broken by periods in the Forestry and Nor'West and the second World War.

Later he became chairman of the Transport board for a period.

● "The Turning Wheel" written by Geof Drake-Brockman tells of his experiences in the first great war, trip to China, the North West, Perth, depression and World War II and was published in 1960.

● In April 1938 a correspondent in the Northern Times was advocating Broome for the Tourists.

● In July 10, 1925 issue the Northern Times carried an advert which read: Knuckey's "Carnarvon's Home of the Gramophone."



Mr. G. Drake Brockman at the time he became North West Commissioner in 1921.